VOLUNTEERS CREATE AN ECOSYSTEM AT WOODLAWN HIGH SCHOOL

Preventing water pollution in Louisiana is an ongoing battle, but through the efforts of LSU's School for the Coast & Environment, volunteers have stepped forward to make a difference at a Baton Rouge high school.

Working under a grant from the Department of Environmental Quality and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, LSU's School of the Coast & Environment is designing and constructing a wetland area in Woodland High School's detention pond. Located in the northwest corner of the campus, the pond receives storm water runoff which contains pollutants such as motor oil, sediments, pesticides, nutrients, heavy metals and gasoline. Those materials can eventually flow into a drainage channel that connects to the Amite River.

Through the project, storm water will pass through three zones that contain more than 65 species of plant life which will serve to filter the water, curtail pollution and prevent downstream flooding. Designed by landscape architect Dana Brown, more than 1,000 plants, including pond cypresses and sweetbay magnolias, will be strategically arranged in the zones so that pollutants and various oxygen depriving nutrients can be extracted before the storm water reaches the Amite River.

"The project will serve as a pilot study of the effectiveness of using wetlands to filter nutrients, sediments and other pollutants from storm water runoff generated from the high school parking lot and nearby cow fields," said Dr. Robert Lane, Research Associate with LSU's School of the Coast & Environment. "The wetland is located in a detention pond built to retain rainwater during major storms and prevent downstream flooding. Such detention ponds are required for all new construction projects, and we hope to make the creation of wetlands within the ponds an additional requirement. Such action would greatly improve water quality in the rivers and streams of Louisiana."

Water samples will be collected and tested monthly by LSU's Analytical Services Laboratory in order to monitor for certain components such as Total Suspended Sediments, Ammonia, Total Phosphorous and Orthophosphate.

The project area facing west as it looked in the fall of 2008

Upon completion, the wetland project will serve to create an aesthetically pleasing environment while setting an ecologically effective, environmentally-sound example for the community.

The weekend of January 17-18 was a success, and volunteers are being sought for the ongoing project, which is expected to continue through March. For more information, please contact Dr. Lane via email at rlane@lsu.edu

Volunteers begin work on the wetland area at Woodlawn High School